DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 362 519 SP 034 795

AUTHOR Pitton, Debra; And Others
TITLE Multicultural Messages: Nonverbal Communication in the Classroom.
PUB DATE 93
NOTE 23p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS American Indians; Asian Americans; Attitudes; Behavior; Blacks; Body Language; *Classroom Communication; *Cross Cultural Training; *Cultural Awareness; *Cultural Differences; Elementary Secondary Education; Ethnic Origins; Eye Contact; Facial Expressions; Higher Education; Hispanic Americans; *Intercultural Communication; Multicultural Education; *Nonverbal Communication; Personal Space; Preservice Teacher Education
IDENTIFIERS African Americans; *Diversity (Student); Euro Americans; Inclusive Educational Programs; Native Americans

ABSTRACT

In the drive to facilitate inclusion in the classroom, one often overlooked factor that affects the environment of all classrooms is nonverbal interaction. This study was conducted to identify some specific nonverbal messages that are often culturally bound; to help educators and others involved in education understand nonverbal signals and avoid inadvertently sending negative messages; and to validate the voice of diverse populations in the classroom. Individuals (N=22) from several cultures (European American, African American, Native American, Asian American, and Hispanic American), who reside in an urban area in Minnesota, were either interviewed or asked to respond to a questionnaire. Results are presented as a synthesis of culturally specific nonverbal behaviors gathered from respondents with respect to: eye contact, personal space, touch, voice, use of gestures, facial expressions, engaging behaviors, symbols, time, directness, educational attitudes, economics, and the function of language. Based on this information, it was concluded that successful integration of knowledge about nonverbal messages is a key component in the initial stages of multicultural education. (Contains 15 references.) (LL)

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ED 362 519

MULTICULTURAL MESSAGES: Nonverbal Communication in the Classroom

by

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Submitted for consideration for the ATE Yearbook III under Division III. Communication-Multicultural

Running head: Messages

SP034795

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ABSTRACT

Creating an atmosphere where young people of diverse backgrounds feel welcome should be the goal of all educators. Unfortunately, many students find that school does not validate their personal cultural experiences, which leads to a feeling of being devalued as individuals. In the drive to facilitate inclusion in the classroom, one often overlooked factor that affects the environment of all classrooms is nonverbal interactions. As Banks and Banks (1993) have stated, educators must understand the function language can play in either helping or inhibiting the educational fulfillment of individuals. Additionally, O'Hair (1992) indicates that if we wish to validate all students, we need to be familiar with the innate nonverbal messages that are a part of each specific culture. This study attempts to identify some of the specific nonverbal messages that are often culturally bound, to help educators and others involved in education understand nonverbal signals and avoid inadvertently sending negative messages.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past 30 years, important movements calling for recognition of the rights and needs of people of color and women have surfaced in this country. The women's movement and the civil rights movement have brought together groups focusing on social change. Central to the purpose of these movements has been the inclusion of groups that have been previously omitted from the 'mainstream' of education in the United States. If we posit that persons concerned about the rights of others are also concerned about educational issues, it is appropriate to focus our discussion on the preparation of teachers. Most educational endeavors have yet to create much emphasis in course work regarding the issue of providing an appropriate classroom environment for women and people of color. It is often apparent that those who are preparing to teach, for the most part, are not receiving adequate training to assist in the preparation of future global citizens. Particularly lacking in teacher preparation is emphasis on multicultural issues, including those needed to exist in a multicultural environment.

Multicultural gender-fair education is education which values cultural pluralism and reflects the view that schools should not seek to melt away cultural differences through forced assimilation. The goal of multicultural education is to change the structure of educational institutions to improve the chances for equal educational opportunities and academic and social achievement for all students (Banks, 1989). Multicultural education should be a process of shared acculturation. Multicultural education programs for teachers, staff, and students must permeate all areas of the educational experience (Warring, 1992). In the drive to facilitate inclusion in the schools, one often overlooked factor that affects the environment of all classrooms is nonverbal interactions. The nonverbal signals and the interpretations made based on these silent messages significantly affects all interactions.

It is often noted that higher education has been, for the most part, a closed system. This study was undertaken to identify additional information that could be utilized to open up that system. Integrating new concepts into the multicultural education programs currently found in many education department curricula will enhance the effectiveness of these programs and assist in the development of teachers who create multicultural, gender-fair, and disability sensitive approaches to teaching.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study were:

- to identify specific information which could assist classroom teachers create an atmosphere of inclusivity in their schools
- to identify methods for the integration of this knowledge into course work for teacher preparation
- to validate the voice of diverse populations in the classroom

PERSPECTIVES

In any attempt to develop a multicultural curriculum and foster a positive atmosphere in classrooms for all students, we determined that it was imperative to focus on the recognition and understanding of culture's influence on communication patterns, particularly looking at nonverbal interactions. Nonverbal behaviors constitute messages to which people attach meaning and are symbols derived from body movements, postures, gestures, facial expressions, eye movements, physical appearance, the use of space, the structure of time, and other behaviors which vary from culture to culture

(Samovar & Porter, 1991). The importance of this meta-communication can be seen from communication research indicating that as much as ninety (90) percent of the social context of a message is transmitted paralinguistically or nonverbally (Mehrabian & Weiner, 1967).

In the early 1970's the state of Minnesota enacted legislation mandating that all teachers and prospective teachers take a course or series of competencies in Human Relations. The course competencies were developed so all teachers would: 1. understand the contributions and lifestyles of various racial, cultural, and economic groups in our society; 2. recognize and deal with dehumanizing biases, prejudices, and discrimination; 3. create environments which contribute to positive self-esteem of persons and to positive interpersonal relations; and 4. respect human diversity and personal rights. More recently the state has added to this list the ability to develop multicultural, gender-fair, and disability sensitive approaches focusing upon multicultural inclusive education. What is lacking in this list of competencies is specific information regarding nonverbal messages.

As teachers, we have an intellectual and ethical responsibility to provide our students with the most current and accurate information available. A more inclusive education has a number of important effects on students. It expands their world view by exposing them to the life experiences of people both similar to, and different from themselves. It provides them the skills to recognize and deal with dehumanizing bias, prejudice, and discrimination. By also incorporating the study of nonverbal messages into pre-service studies, teachers will more readily be able to help students become cognizant of culture, ethnicity, and gender as important variables in everyday life. This will also help students, as they will benefit from an increased appreciation of diversity when they assume their future roles as parents, teachers, community leaders, co-workers, employers, and citizens. An inclusive education should facilitate the changes in climate necessary to ensure ongoing change, and knowledge of culturally specific nonverbal communication patterns can enhance this process.

We are all members of social systems and schools are also specific systems. Systems create, maintain, and/or change culture. Culture (Banks & Banks, 1993) consists of: knowledge, concepts, values, beliefs, symbols, and interpretations. In order to understand the impact of these variables, we need to understand nonverbal communication. We must engage in paradigm shifts by redefining categories and criteria to develop a broader understanding of nonverbal messages. A full, practical understanding of the dimensions along which cultures differ, combined with the knowledge of how specific communication acts vary cross-culturally, has several positive implications (Andersen, 1987). This knowledge will challenge our assumptions about our own and others' behaviors. As educators, however, this knowledge regarding the nonverbal communication patterns of diverse groups will also assist us in becoming more accurate with our attributions of others.

Culture touches nearly every phase of the communication process and is inseparable because it is learned. Culture, along with traits, situations, and states is one of the four primary sources of interpersonal behavior (Andersen, 1987). In order to meet the goals of inclusive education, it is wise to integrate information about nonverbal communication into traditional teacher preparation courses, to achieve cultural and gender balance, and to totally transform the entire curriculum. Ideally, diversity can be appreciated when different cultural values and practices are accorded validity and respect. The use of an integration approach to multicultural education provides more legitimacy for the inclusion of diversity throughout the entire curriculum via

this multi-disciplinary approach. The study of nonverbal communication can be one thread to link the various aspects of an education curriculum. Through this approach, future educators and their potential students can develop higher levels of respect and empathy for the global concerns now being faced.

METHOD AND DATA SOURCE

Several sources (O'Hair, 1992; Banks & Banks, 1993; Samovar & Porter, 1991) have identified positive nonverbal communication as an important component of a classroom that is welcoming to all cultures. In light of this fact, it was determined that information regarding culturally specific nonverbal behaviors should be identified for teachers to use as a guide when interacting with cultures different from their own. Going beyond the textbook descriptions, interviews were conducted with individuals from several cultures to validate some general nonverbal behaviors. Where interviews could not be conducted, individuals were asked to respond in writing to the questionnaire used by interviewers. While many of the sources used in this study validated behaviors documented by formal research, it is imperative to add that this information is just a guide, as each specific individual, regardless of their ethnicity, has their own communication style and may or may not follow the generalities identified below.

It has been stated (Samovar & Porter, 1991) that we communicate primarily from our cultural experience, and that our nonverbal behaviors reflect these deeply rooted cultural mores. If, as educators, we want to communicate effectively with our students, it is imperative that we familiarize ourselves with the student's nonverbal communication patterns. The response to the interviews overwhelmingly indicated that teachers do not understand the acceptable nonverbal behaviors of their diverse student populations, and that children are often uncomfortable with the teacher's nonverbal messages as they conflict with the child's personal experience. However, respondents often indicated that they personally were able to go beyond these nonverbal behaviors and communicate with anyone utilizing the dominant culture's nonverbal methods.

While some answers to the interviews may be representative of a specific sub-set as opposed to the larger cultural group, (i.e. Vietnamese American rather than Asian American), some generalizations about each culture can be made. All interviewees/respondents (22 in all) were individuals who presently reside in a Minnesota urban area, thus their response might vary from people of the same culture living in other parts of the United States. The answers confirm and expand other research, and it is hoped that these findings will enable the classroom teacher to reflect on their nonverbal behavior and attempt to create positive interactions between themselves and children of diverse cultures. It is also hoped that the classroom teacher will use these generalizations as a lens with which to view his/her student's behavior, and that in doing so, he/she may understand the child's cultural perspective more completely. If a child feels that his/her culture is validated by the teacher, via appropriate nonverbal communication, the child will undoubtedly develop a more positive self image. The enhancing of a child's self esteem is central to their success in school (Banks and Banks, 1993). Therefore, teachers must incorporate a knowledge of appropriate and culturally specific nonverbal communication behaviors into their repertoire of teaching skills.

RESULTS

SYNTHESIS OF CULTURALLY SPECIFIC NONVERBAL BEHAVIORS

EYE CONTACT:

European American

European Americans generally prefer direct eye contact. It is a sign of confidence and respect for children and adults to look directly into the eyes of the individual with whom they are speaking. Eye contact is associated with effective listening in the European American culture. Looking away or casting your eyes downward is viewed as a sign of disinterest, shyness or disrespect. Eyes are viewed as the "windows of the soul" and European Americans often think they can understand a person better by looking into their eyes to "read" the emotion presented by their gaze.

African American

While African American adults usually use a direct gaze when speaking to others to show interest, African American children often do not look at a teacher or any authority figure when talking, especially if they are being reprimanded, out of respect and sometimes, fear. When trust has been established and a child is comfortable with their teacher, eye contact increases. Looking into the eyes of another is often used by African Americans to show that the individual wants to ask a question. Some respondents indicated that the use of direct eye contact might be one way to gain control of a conversation or situation. Looking away while listening is not viewed as a sign of disinterest, but merely as a "thinking" response.

Native American

Native American culture teaches that direct eye contact is intrusive. As a sign of respect, children and adults often will not look at the person with whom they are speaking, especially with an authority figure such as a teacher. Maintaining eye contact for traditional Native Americans is often considered disrespectful, hostile or rude. It is recommended that teachers should not demand eye contact from their Native American students.

Asian American

Direct eye contact, especially between individuals who do not know each other well, or in a formal setting such as school is considered inappropriate, even shameful, for Asian Americans. As the eyes reveal the emotional qualities of the person, it is not appropriate to look into the eyes of another, as this contact is too intimate. However, at times it is desirable to be able to look into another's eyes to "read messages" and identify the other person's true feelings. Children and adults will often cast their gaze downward while speaking, especially in deference to authority. A heightened sense of modesty is indicated by the downcast, demure glances of some females.

Hispanic American

While eye contact is acceptable for most Hispanic American people, prolonged eye contact is often considered disrespectful. Lengthy eye contact is reserved for private or intimate conversations. Interrupted gaze is often a standard for Hispanic American adults and children. Children will often lower their eyes when reprimanded, as they are taught to be respectful of those in authority. It

is uncomfortable for most Hispanic American children to use direct eye contact until they develop a trusting relationship with their teacher.

PERSONAL SPACE:

European American

The predominant reaction for European Americans is to encircle themselves with a "bubble" of personal space which distances them about twenty to thirty six inches from the person which whom they are speaking, keeping all conversations at "arms length". Closer proximity is reserved for intimate relationships. This formal distance is a sign of respect and also can be an indicator of the power an individual possesses. Students are not expected to get close to the teacher, who represents power and authority, unless the teacher has indicated that it is acceptable by prior interactions, although this is more often the case in secondary education as opposed to elementary education.

African American

Blacks often prefer to talk with their whole body, and thus will need a lot of space around themselves in which to gesticulate and move. On the other hand, some African Americans like to "get in your face" when talking, as the intensity of their emotions and feelings can be transmitted by their proximity to the person with whom they are speaking. This apparent contradiction, wanting lots of space but also preferring to be close, to seems to be situational and conversation between members of the same culture will tend to be more animated and closer in proximity. Acceptable personal space for some African Americans is closer to 6-12 inches, or an arms length away. An African American individual with a strong emotional reaction such as excitement or anger may respond with movement towards and away from the other individual as well as close proximity.

Native American

Native Americans often do not feel the need to be close when speaking to another and often will converse in a side-by-side fashion as opposed to face-to-face. A respectful listening distance is preferable to close proximity during conversation. Two to three feet is an acceptable distance for conversation, closer contact may be considered rude. Native Americans wishing to speak to someone will stand just out of the individual's line of vision and "catch the person's eye" and wait to be recognized for conversational purposes.

Asian American

Asian Americans prefer a more formal distance when speaking to others in public. The Asian American concept of personal space is greater than that used by European Americans in conversational speaking. Individuals speaking in close proximity create a feeling of discomfort. However, the close proximity of family members within the home, as indicated by parent/child interactions, is acceptable.

Hispanic American

The warmth and emotional exuberance of most Hispanic American people is indicated in the close proximity in which they stand to people with whom they are conversing. Often Hispanic Americans will stand six to eight inches closer than a European American would when engaging in conversation. It is also common for individuals to sit or stand side-by-side when speaking as opposed

to face-to-face. interactions. Closer proximity is used more often when the conversation is between family members or people from their culture.

TOUCH:

European American

Americans of northern European ethnicity rarely touch each other during conversation. Some individuals whose culture stems from the Mediterranean region may feel more comfortable about touching. Handshakes between individuals is an acceptable and formal form of touching, more familiarity might be indicated among women by a hug and in some cases, even a kiss on the cheek. Men may slap each other on the back to indicate stronger sentiment, although hugs between men who are good friends is becoming more acceptable. In most cases, however, touching carries a sexual connotation and older children and adults do not touch each other unless they are close friends or family.

African American

A common theme found among African American respondents was that of reciprocity. If an individual such as a teacher touches an African American child, it then becomes acceptable for the child to touch the teacher. Touching of the hair or any touch that could be interpreted as subservient is unacceptable (i.e., patting on the head). Touching on the shoulder, back, arms or hands is acceptable for school age children, but is usually reserved for close, intimate relationships with adults.

Native American

Public displays of affection are rare in this culture as one is expected to respectfully keep their emotions hidden. Gentle touches and hugs to covey encouragement are acceptable for young students and small children. The conversation style of Native Americans could be characterized as gentle. Handshakes are done with a very gentle clasping of the hands. Gentleness is a sign of the deep respect that permeates the Native American culture, and a more intense handshake may be viewed as disrespectful.

Asian American

Individuals from Asian American cultures prefer not to shake hands, as the touching of strangers is considered inappropriate. It is often acceptable for two friends of the same sex to hold hands, but men and women do not hold hands in public. Kissing is a private exchange, and while babies are given many hugs and kisses, this is not the case between parents and older children. As emotional exchanges are not often exhibited, it is extremely inappropriate for men and women to touch. A slight bow or clasping the hands in front of the chest is a respectful greeting. The head is considered sacred by many, and therefore, pats on the head are very offensive.

Hispanic American

Hispanic Americans will usually touch friends and relatives with whom they are talking, often giving a pat on the back or arm. Because of their strong commitment to family, Hispanic Americans often choose to communicate with friends and relatives in this more familiar manner. Embracing or kissing on the cheek is a frequent greeting. This is more common between individuals

within the culture, although Hispanic American children often greet their teachers with hugs.

VOICE:

European American

European Americans typically interpret vocal tone and inflection as representative of the emotion the speaker is feeling. This emotional quality or subtext of the conversation is more influential than the words, or context of the speech. Teachers need to be aware of the tone they use and what message that conveys to students regarding the teacher's feelings about the topic. Inflection is used to signal the end of a sentence or turn taking roles in European American conversations. While European Americans do not use excessive vocal variety, animation of the voice is typical in conversations between friends, whereas a more formal tone, using less modulation of pitch will be used in business and professional exchanges. European Americans find loud, strident voices offensive, breathy voices sensual, and nasal tonal qualities irritating.

African American

Individuals from the African American culture often have strong, assertive voices. This is exemplified by loud tones and a high level of intensity during conversation. It has been suggested by some respondents that years of oppression which denied African Americans the opportunity to speak are now counter-balanced with the intensity of their free speech. The emotional intensity of some conversations is often reflected by the use of a wide range of vocal variety and volume variations. African American speech also may reflect a phonetic style and patterned rhythmic quality that is found in "rap". Imagery and vivid language, handed down through oral traditions, is used to generate responses in listeners. Children in school also enjoy conversing, but may be quiet when asked a direct question out of respect or fear of authority.

Native American

Expressing emotions to strangers is not comfortable for Native Americans. Therefore, low tones, soft voices and moderate vocal variety are more typical of the speaking patterns of this culture. Silence is viewed as strength. Words are chosen carefully as this culture has an oral tradition which uses a few select words to represent their feelings. The words used in conversation may be allegorical, as the message of the words, or context, is more important than the emotional reaction, or subtext. Native Americans may have to spend time studying and reflecting on the words of their elders to ascertain the meaning of some conversations and stories. When conversing with authority figures, such as teachers, Native American childrens' voices will often be quiet and emotionally flat. This is often do to the fact that traditionally they are taught to value stillness and quiet, to observe and listen, rather than talk.

Asian American

Asian Americans consider the expression of emotions to be inappropriate. Covering emotional expressions is typical in conversation, therefore little use is made of vocal variety as a means to convey feelings. Words, or the context of conversations are more important. Quiet voices with little modulation are often used in conversations with authority figures as it is considered poor

manners and a sign of disrespect to speak or laugh loudly. Silence is respected and tones are often hushed. Losing one's temper is considered impolite and inappropriate. The natural expressive sounds of many Asian languages creates many variations of pitch and volume, however, and these can create a very expressive quality that accompanies their spoken language.

Hispanic American

Hispanic Americans, especially females, will be quite vocally expressive, identifying the emotional subtext of their dialogue. This is indicated by the use of vocal variety and intensity of tone. Energetic voices are often heard during conversations among friends. The natural warmth of the Hispanic American culture is often seen in the sensual and intimate conversational style used by many individuals, and their apparent enjoyment of conversation. The lively and emotional qualities are more often heard when individuals are speaking their native language.

USE OF GESTURES:

European American

Many European Americans "speak with their hands", and gestures are used to reinforce conversation. Intense use of gestures indicates strong emotional connection with the topic of conversation, as gestures indicate the subtext of the conversation. Open armed gestures, turning and even leaning toward the speaker show interest and agreement. Closed arm gestures, turning away from the speaker or slouching are interpreted as disinterest or disagreement.

African American

Individuals from the African American culture often use emphatic gestures to reinforce their dialogue and punctuate their conversation with movement. Many open and closed gestures ,similar to European American interpretations, are incorporated into conversation. These gestures are used, often dramatically, to emphasize how the speaker feels about the topic of conversation. Relaxed posture is common in African American conversation. When listening, however, a relaxed stance and lowered head may indicate that the individual has "tuned out" the person with whom he/she is speaking. Turning away from the speaker during conversation is common, but this movement doesn't necessarily indicate disinterest, and may indeed be a sign of respect and interest. This same movement away from the speaker may also be an indication that personal issues are being discussed.

Native American

Gestures are purposeful and not random in the Native American culture. Their oral tradition often uses hand movements to reinforce the story line of a conversation. Strong emotional response as indicated by gesticulation is not appropriate. As gestures and body movement can reveal a person's feelings, they are not often utilized in the Native American culture. Respect for others mandates that Native Americans keep their emotions to themselves, and gestures might indicate an emotional reaction and intrude on another's feelings or attitudes. They are used sparingly.

Asian American

Gestures are not used to emphasize emotions in the Asian American culture,

the hands clasped in front of the body is considered more appropriate and respectful. Waving or "come here" motions can be offensive as they are used to call small children and/or animals and should not be used in conversation. For some ethnic groups, pointing with hands or feet (as when a crossed foot is pointing at someone) is offensive. Head movement may be used to locate or "point" as opposed to the other extremities. The oral tradition of many Asian American cultures incorporates gestures to reinforce the context, or words, of a story within the conversation. The use of the hands to cover the mouth in an attempt to mask emotional reactions or laughter is also common.

Hispanic American

For Hispanic American people, the gesticulation which accompanies strong emotional conversation is common. The subtext or emotion is much more valuable that the words themselves. Often very visual in their style, Hispanic Americans like to "see" a conversation punctuated with gestures and movement. The use of animated gestures is more often found when individuals are engaging in conversation in their native language.

FACIAL EXPRESSIONS:

European American

Facial expressions for European Americans are connected to the emotional feelings accompanying a conversation. The emotion conveyed through facial expression may reinforce the dialogue or contradict the words being spoken. Interpretation of facial expression is what gives European Americans a clue to what the speaker really means. There are some commonalties in European American expressions, a frown means concern or unhappiness; a smile means happiness or pleasure; but individuals need to be careful in attaching meaning to facial expressions with out asking the speaker for validation of their interpretation, especially since unpleasant emotions are less accurately perceived than pleasant ones. In addition, it is more acceptable for European Americans to show positive emotions facially than negative emotions, and many individuals "cover" their true emotions with a "false face."

African American

In the African American culture, all emotions are conveyed facially, but more emphatic facial expressions are used in family and inter-cultural conversations. Facial expressions exhibited in conversation are similar to European American interpretations. Negative emotions are more acceptable when indicated by facial expressions in the African American culture, and are often reinforced by strong body movements and gestures. "Giving someone the eye" to let them know your negative feelings is often utilized in the this culture.

Native American

Emotional displays via facial expressions are not the norm. Limited use of facial expressions is found in this culture, as individuals are respectfully trying to keep their emotions hidden. Giving a particular "look" to children to let them know you are displeased with their behavior is often utilized in the this culture. As in the case with several other cultures, such as Israelis, smiling in response to a greeting, especially by a stranger, is not always acceptable. Therefore, not receiving a smile from a Native American in

response to a greeting should not be interpreted negatively by those in authority.

Asian American

Indicating one's emotional reaction to a conversation is not appropriate in the Asian American culture. Smiles are used to mask other emotions, especially negative feelings or confrontational reactions. A smile can mean anything, but the use of other facial expressions is considered inappropriate and disrespectful.

Hispanic American

Facial expressions for Hispanic American people usually accompany the emotional quality of their conversation. In some cases, the subtext, or emotional message, is more important than the context, or words of the dialogue. Thus the facial expressions utilized in a conversation may represent a more valid view of the exchange than do the words. These intense facial expressions are more readily used in family conversations than with others.

ENGAGING BEHAVIORS:

European American

It is appropriate for anyone to start a conversation in the European American culture. There are still some individuals that find it more appropriate for men to initiate conversation with women, but in most cases, either sex can begin a conversation. Power and authority will be a greater influence in determining whether an individual feels comfortable initiating a conversation. It is considered impolite to interrupt, and children are socialized not to speak when another individual is talking. Turn taking is regulated by pauses in the conversation and vocal inflection which indicate that the speaker is finished. Nodding the head, smiling, raising the eye brows all indicate that the listener wants the speaker to continue. Listening is indicated by looking directly at the speaker. While spontaneity in conversation is found more readily in dialogues between friends, there is acknowledgment that one must "take turns" during conversation.

African American

Spontaneity in conversation is an acceptable component of African American communication, although interrupting another speaker in conversation can be perceived as rude. Speaker and audience are often interchangeable as an African American listener will often "call out" or respond to a speaker. These forms of interruptions are acceptable as they identify the connection and sense of community that exists between speaker and listener. While this type of an exchange is more common within the African American community, teachers need to be aware of this and be accepting of such comments. In addition, age gives dominance to an individual in a conversation, as respect for elders will allow the older person to speak first and more frequently. Despite the acceptance of spontaneity in African American conversation, turn taking rules, similar to European American indicators, are used in formal conversation.

Native American

Formal turn taking is important in the Native American culture. Interrupting

is considered rude, and elders are asked their opinion and listened to respectfully. Children are not usually the initiators of conversation, and will often be silent around authority figures such as teachers. Many Native Americans will deny or disavow their own accomplishments in conversation, as bragging is culturally inappropriate. Many Native Americans will wait silently, thinking before responding in a conversation. Listening with the eyes closed is a sign that the individual is listening carefully to what is being said. Observational learning is important in the Native American culture, and many adults and children will watch and reflect before trying something or participating in a new event or conversation. The non aggressive behavior that is traditionally taught as a sign of respect for individuals by Native American parents results in mannerisms that are more passive that typical European American behaviors.

Asian American

Asian American people usually show deference to others, thus will not often attempt to initiate conversation. Children are taught that it is impolite to speak when an adult, especially an elder or a teacher, is talking. Traditional deference to the hierarchy of the family is part of most Asian American cultures, and emphasis is placed on the family as a group. Therefore, children may not feel comfortable asserting their individual rights as they are taught to be loyal to the group. Interrupting is not acceptable in any conversation. Learning is often reflective, or observational, and thus children will be hesitant to respond verbally in classroom settings.

Hispanic American

Lively exchanges with interjections from all those involved are often found in Hispanic American conversations, individuals do not need to wait for a pause to enter the discussion. Interruptions are interpreted as eagerness, involvement and interest regarding the topic. Respect towards elders is indicated by requesting their ideas regarding a topic, and deferring to the elder's right to speak. Children and adults enjoy conversation. When children feel comfortable in a relationship, will often speak enthusiastically and ask many questions.

SYMBOLS:

European American

Hair, dress, jewelry, and even the way one walks are often identified by European Americans as indicators of a person's status, class or occupation. Overuse of accessories is often considered tacky. Tailored clothes and trim hair are seen as indicators of a high status job and financial security. Long unkempt hair and ragged clothes are seen as indicators of poverty or rebelliousness. A confident walk denotes someone of authority and confidence, while a slower gate or hesitant step are interpreted as indicators of ineptitude.

African American

For members of the African American community, clothing is a matter of personal taste and does not indicate the financial status of the individual. Hair is important, as the styling is often unique to the African American culture and thus is representative of their heritage. African influences in dress, hair

and jewelry also dignify their cultural heritage and the use of accessories is common for both men and women. Religious or fraternal symbols and colors are sometimes displayed. In addition, some young African American men will develop a slow walk or stroll that is an expression of their attitude, and "walk'n the walk" is an important part of developing their identity.

Native American

Jewelry and clothing identifying their cultural heritage are important to some Native American people, yet considered a vulgar display of wealth by other tribes. Many men as well as women will wear their hair in a long style similar to their forefathers, as hair often has spiritual meaning. Some tribes believe that hair length is related to health and knowledge, and it is a sign of adherence to traditions.

Asian American

Ceremony, ritual and formality are important in most Asian American cultures. Hair and clothing appropriate for these ceremonies are usually reserved for wear on these special occasions. Traditional women will respectfully walk behind the men, as dictated by Confucian beliefs which designate a hierarchy giving husbands and fathers superior status, although these beliefs are changing. Respect and deference to elders is a sign of the importance of the family. The use of phrases such as "our mother" as opposed to "my mother" indicates the connection to the family unit and the group as opposed to individuality.

Hispanic American

Family gatherings and religious festivals are important celebrations for Hispanic American people. Dressing up and wearing cultural accessories are also part of the Hispanic American tradition. The strong sense of family is reflected in the Hispanic American authority system. Loyalty is given to God, (or religious leaders) then to the father of the family. Mothers are not necessarily regulated to a lesser position as their nurturing role is vital to the family, but the father is identified as the head of the household. Elders are respected and remain with their families in their old age.

TIME:

European American

In the United States the dominant European American culture is based on monochronic time. Schedules, segmentation and promptness are valued, and the focus is on the clock. Being on time is viewed as respectful, and competition of tasks on a schedule is considered vital. Power and authority can dictate aberrations to this, as a person in charge can be more flexible with time. To be "doing something" is important - one must not "waste time". Being late or keeping others waiting is considered extremely rude. Anglos use time as a planning tool, enabling them to focus on the future as well as the present.

African American culture

While some African Americans follow the mainstream concept of time, many do not follow schedules as rigidly as European Americans. Hanging out or the use of "hang-loose time" reflects a focus on what is happening at that particular instant. Focus on the here and now as opposed to the future is

common. Family matters and issues take president over other concerns. A focus on people is more valued than a focus on time.

Native American

Some traditional Native Americans see time only as it concerns the here and now. Past and future are elements that seem to have less importance. Thus being late or keeping others waiting is not an intentional action, it is just that what is happening in the present is of primary importance. Native Americans are very people-focused. Respecting the needs of individuals takes president over schedules. In addition, Native Americans often take time to assess a situation before responding to a conversation or situation. This relaxed sense of time may be at odds with the dominant culture, however many Native Americans today have adopted the European American view of time.

Asian American

Time is considered flexible to most Asian American. Individuals from these cultures often do not hurry or worry about punctuality, unless important matters, such as family issues, are being considered. Elders are always attended to first. Patience and the ability to wait are viewed as strengths. Some individuals retain beliefs leaning toward predestination, which allows them to feel unconcerned about time because "what will happen, will happen." Many Asian Americans have assimilated the European American importance of being on time.

Hispanic American

Hispanic American people are usually more concerned with the present than the future. Time is seen as polychronic, characterized by many things happening at once and with a much looser notion of what is "on time", or" late". Hispanic Americans often do not hesitate to interrupt activities or procedures leading in one directions to accommodate another request, especially if it is from a family member. People are not expected to proceed on exact schedules. Being late is not considered rude, but just a function of how long it takes the individual to get to where he/she is going or complete a task. People are given priority, not time.

DIRECTNESS:

European American:

European American conversation is becoming increasingly more direct and most subjects are open for discussion. Problems are dealt with in a direct, sometimes confrontational manner, as European Americans like to "get down to business" and don't "pull any punches". However, many individuals from this culture are still uncomfortable with directness and will approach a difficult topic in a round about way.

African American

Spontaneous reactions to emotional issues are often found in African American conversation, and the use of analogies and stories are an attempt to convey the exact events and feelings to the listener. Words are used to create moods. African American or street English can be used to "diss" or "play the dozens" with another person. In this type of an exchange, the oral tradition becomes a game, with one individual trying to put down the other with

increasingly clever and intense descriptions. This is a round about, or indirect, way of confronting an individual that may result in a more direct confrontation. In addition, direct questions of a personal nature, are not appreciated. In time, if trust has been established, an African American child may become more direct and open with a teacher or authority figure when asked about personal concerns. Response to individuals from other cultures may be given less readily and with more defensiveness than to members of their own culture, due to the history of oppression which has created a sense of distrust for some members of the African American community.

Native American

Direct confrontation is uncomfortable in the Native American culture. Stories and analogies as found in their oral tradition are more readily employed to get to the heart of an issue. The culture is community centered, thus individual conflict or competition is not encouraged, the indirect approach is utilized in conversation. Direct questions of a personal nature, especially by someone outside the family like a teacher, are not appreciated. The oral tradition and use of stories necessitate the development of effective listening skills, and children often will wait and reflect before responding in school.

Asian American

Expressing emotions is uncomfortable for most Asian Americans. Conflicts and difficult topics are dealt with in a subtle manner. Many Asian Americans also use humble and deprecatory terms when referring to themselves or their children, and complimentary expressions are used for others. Politeness and respect are important values and thus these peoples will try to be positive about all issues. Uniformity and conformity are valued by many Asian Americans, and children are taught to be loyal to their group - be it family or community. Teachers will need to note this deference to the group and respect the Asian American's need for polite and careful conversation when dealing with difficult topics.

Hispanic American

The Hispanic American culture prefers to approach difficult subjects in an indirect fashion. Confrontational situations are not comfortable or respectful, and individuals will often use an incomplete or evasive response to avoid them. The emotional connectedness Hispanic Americans have with family and friends often makes it difficult for them to convey negative or unpleasant information. The Hispanic American's focus on family and interdependence creates an atmosphere where everyone helps each other. This desire to help others will manifest itself in the classroom and students will feel more comfortable in cooperative tasks as opposed to independent activities. In addition, the Hispanic American child, taught to respect authority, often will not question or challenge a teacher.

EDUCATIONAL ATTITUDES:

European American

European American parents usually value education quite highly and this attitude is conveyed to their children. The success or failure of a parent in their own schooling as well as economic factors will affect the child's feelings about school. The importance of education for job and personal satisfaction is a view often held by European Americans.

African American

School is usually valued by African American parents if the school is positive in its dealings with them. Many African American individuals value education but think that it is not within their reach, as they have been made to feel incapable of achieving in academic settings. Children need to see the connection between education and their own lives. Often, out of necessity when dealing with issues such as poverty and inequality, more concern is given to life in the present, and it is sometimes difficult for African American children to see the connection between education and the future. Although many African Americans acknowledge the necessity of using European American grammar and sentence structure in formal conversations, they value the inclusion of both forms of dialogue in the schools. In addition, there is some distrust towards an educational system that has not been successful in meeting the needs of African American children. Respondents stated that schools often do not support the African American child or understand his/her background.

Native American

The family orientation of Native American people make it imperative that parents convey the importance of education. Due to historical factors in which older Native Americans were forced to attend boarding schools and denied their culture, many parents are fearful or skeptical of European American schools. A school that has teachers who are respectful and sensitive to the needs of Native Americans will be more successful in creating positive attitudes about school. Trust must be established between the teacher and the parents before parents will become strong supporters of education.

Asian American

A deep respect and reverence for teachers and education is found in most Asian American cultures. Based on the values of traditional Confucian, Buddhist and Taoist scholars, Asian American cultures historically have placed great value on education . The love of learning is in itself a tradition. Parents urge their children to do well in school, and the educational success of an individual is considered a great honor for the entire family.

Hispanic American

Education is valued because children are important in the family oriented Hispanic American culture. Teachers, as authority figures, are respected. However, the needs of the family may come before education. Children are expected to follow their parent's wishes, therefore it is vital for teachers to connect in a positive way with parents. Trust must be established between parents and teachers to facilitate parental involvement in the educational process.

ECONOMICS:

European American:

Despite low economic factors, European Americans usually believe that an education is the ticket to a better life. Poverty can interfere with this view as children see that school did not seem to increase their parent's lifestyle. Parents often promote education as a means of getting a good job and enjoying

a better lifestyle than they themselves had, as opposed to valuing education for the sake of learning.

African American

African American children who live in poverty do not have the benefits that their middle class peers have. Societal factors can place children in living situations where they are economically disadvantaged and where the African American culture is not celebrated but seen in a negative light. Living for today becomes more important than an education when there are limited possibilities for the future. The disadvantages of poverty often affect the success of African American children in school. Economic advantage, however, seems to encourage members of this culture to adapt or use some of the dominant culture's nonverbal behaviors and grammatical structures as a means of coping. This adaptation skill may not be used or valued by disadvantaged youth.

Native American

Family is the first priority for Native Americans. Education may be short changed if economic factors call for children to help out the family either with child care or other work. The disadvantages of poverty often affect the success of these children in school. Economic advantage, however, seems to encourage members of this culture to adapt or use some of the dominant culture's nonverbal behaviors as a means of coping. However, the gentle Indian behaviors and values are often viewed more highly within the Native American community than by the dominant culture.

Asian American

Asian American children are looked on as an extension of the entire family. Thus, doing well in school is valued as it reflects on the entire family. Despite poor economic factors, children are still encouraged to go to school, and families take great pride in their schoolwork. Parents want to be involved in their child's school work, and although they may not feel comfortable attending school functions, they will inquire into their child's work and encourage them to "study hard."

Hispanic American

The disadvantages of poverty often affect the success of Hispanic American children in school. For low income Hispanic American families, daily survival is more important than education. Family obligations such as child care and work to supplement income are often priorities. Economic advantage, however, seems to encourage members of this culture to adapt or use some of the dominant culture's nonverbal behaviors as a means of coping. This adaptation skill is often not used or valued by disadvantaged youth.

FUNCTION OF LANGUAGE:

European American:

In the European American culture language has been called the social glue and is the primary means of exchanging ideas. Conversations can be held for numerous reasons, from making business deals to expressing emotions to teaching. Sometimes conversation is therapeutic, when individuals talk about a problem or a concern and attempt to solve difficulties. Other times, conversation is merely a verbal exchange to pass the time. Conversation and

language can be used for multiple purposes, but there is usually some underlying reason for having the dialogue.

African American

Conversation and language in the African American culture is a means of communicating values, beliefs and customs to others. Among people of the African American community, communication reflects the culture and is a common denominator for individuals. With members of other ethnic groups, communication may be intended to make a statement about the African American culture or used as a means of promoting the advancement of African Americans within the European American society.

Native American

Conversation is always purposeful for Native Americans. When an individual has something to say, it is stated after careful consideration. Rambling thoughts or aimless conversations are usually not found in the Native American culture. The traditional teachings of quiet observation promote listening over talking. Respect for others is reflected in the quiet, thoughtful responses given in conversation.

Asian American

Conversation is an enjoyable activity for most Asians when talking with members of their family or community. Dialogue between the sexes is not usually encouraged in traditional homes, and a third party often conveys expressions of affection for interested couples. All conversations are expected to reflect respect for elders and authority as well as conveying the focus on the whole as opposed to the individual. When involved in public situations or exchanges, this respect will often lead to silence on the part of the Asian American individual as they defer to others in the conversation.

Hispanic American

Hispanic American people expect individuals to join in conversations. This is a sign of respect as "getting to know" someone is part of developing a relationship and key to the art of conversation. Hispanic Americans are practical people who want a meaningful interpretation of their work and conversation. Knowledge about people and the human experience is more important than vague, abstract conversations. For children as well as adults the desire to socialize is strong, and employees and students will want to interact while working on a project. The strong family focus held by Hispanic American people encourages individuals to assist each other with tasks, a situation not often viewed favorably by a dominant culture that stresses independent work.

[note: This chart reflects information gathered from those individuals interviewed by the authors and those responding to the questionnaire, with some descriptions reinforced by the sources cited in this text.]

CONCLUSION/IMPLICATION FOR EDUCATORS

The successful integration of knowledge about nonverbal messages is a key component in the initial stages of multicultural education. Understanding culturally specific nonverbal communication gives educators a concrete tool

which, when utilized in the classroom, will undoubtedly lead to significant changes in the attitudes and behaviors on the part of teachers who use this knowledge. This will in turn assist in the achievement of some societal goals such as the reduction of prejudice and discrimination as well as moving to provide social justice (Warring, 1992).

Institutions of higher education that provide coursework for teachers in multicultural/gender fair education must utilize instructional strategies which incorporate the study of nonverbal messages. This will provide a basic understanding of the values and differences of diverse groups, and present the positive effects of integrating this information into all interactions in the classroom. Specific pedagogical techniques are essential to integrating factual information about people of color and women into the classroom. A positive instructional system utilizing cooperative task structures in which students spend much of their time in heterogeneous groups earning recognition, praise, and rewards based on the academic performance of their respective groups would be most effective.

People within a culture may view things similarly (paradigm). The essence of culture is how members of groups interpret, use, and perceive various elements. An appropriate paradigm to develop is one that utilizes a pluralistic, multidimensional process. Through the recognition of the nuances of culturally specific non-verbal behavior, teachers can validate all students in their classrooms and model acceptance and understanding of difference. This will in turn create a new culture, one which includes the gradually evolving knowledge and ideas that are accumulating as the society faces new difficulties or as it develops in anticipation of future survival problems.

Multicultural education is a necessary effort to change teaching and learning approaches so that students of both genders and from diverse cultural and ethnic groups will have equal opportunities to learn and succeed in educational institutions. Empowerment is a key. Acceptance and understanding of a culture's non-verbal communication patterns is essential to developing an atmosphere where students are empowered. Educators who enter their classrooms with a clear understanding and acceptance of the diverse non-verbal communication behaviors of their students have a dynamic tool for empowering our future generations.

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